

I was standing between Hashem and you at that time, to relate the word of Hashem to you – for you were afraid of the fire and you did not ascend the mountain. (5:5)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* served as an intermediary between Hashem and the people in the days leading up to the Revelation. During the Giving of the Torah, Moshe's services were even more necessary, since the people drew back in fear of the awesomeness of the experience. According to the commentators, the *pasuk* is informing us that *Klal Yisrael* did not ascend the mountain because they were afraid of the fire. In *Shemos* 19:12, the Torah teaches that the people were commanded to set boundaries around the mountain. They were enjoined, "Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge." The question is obvious: If they were in such fear of the fire, why was it necessary to command them to stay away? Is it necessary to warn a person to stay clear of a burning building?

Horav Bentzion Firer, zl, suggests a practical reason for this enjoinder. Fear is an insufficient deterrent to prevent one from crossing the line. When the Torah "provides" us with a prohibition, it obviously takes this into account. Out of complacency, people slowly became used to the fear, and it was no longer overwhelming to them. As a result, the fear which at one time had captivated their attention, preventing them from acting negatively – no longer had that hold on them. Thus, Hashem bolstered them with a command prohibiting them from coming near to the mountain.

This hypothesis may be supported with the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, of which five are quite common-sensical. Theft, adultery, murder, honoring one's parents, false testimony: all are prohibitions which make sense, *mitzvos* which any decent human being would observe. The Torah clearly does not rely on a person's sense of decency. People will find excuses to justify their errant behavior. When there are no excuses, the reply will be, "I felt that I had to do it" or "I really do not care." Emotions are stronger than *seichel*, intelligence and common sense. Nonetheless, apparently *seichel* and *regesh*, emotion, are insufficient deterrents even to something as obvious as fire. Only Hashem's command suffices.